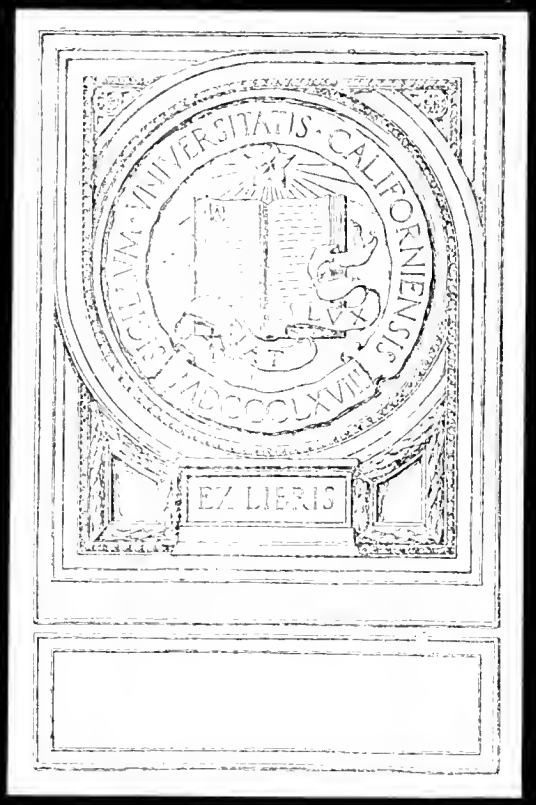
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Executive Training
for Foremen

Suggestions to Leaders

The leader's task in this training course is not so much to give lectures as to stimulate and guide the members of the class in reading and discussing their own problems. Careful reading of the class and conversation suggestions that follow should help you prove successful.

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EXECUTIVE TRAINING FOR FOREMEN

A Study Course

By

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University of Cincinnati, with the Assistance
of Twelve Manufacturing Executives

SUGGESTIONS TO LEADERS

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EXECUTIVE TRAINING FOR FOREMEN

SUGGESTIONS TO LEADERS

Character and Aims of Leader

Success in organizing and conducting any kind of training courses depends more largely upon the leader of such work than is ordinarily believed. This is especially true where the class membership consists of those who have been engaged for a long period in practical work. Were it possible to ascertain the actual causes of failure where courses of this character have been conducted, it would doubtless be found that incompetent leadership stands at the head of the list. In view of this, it will be well to state in definite form what leaders of such work should, and should not, do.

In order that leadership of any type of work may meet with even moderate success, it is essential that four fundamental principles be observed, namely:

(1) The leader must know definitely what he is trying to get done, the end in view, the goal he is aiming at.

(2) He must understand the nature of those taking the work, what their experience has been, what their reactions to it have been, etc.

(3) He must know how to find, and must actually select material (subject matter) suitable for making the end in view attainable.

(4) He must adopt and pursue such methods of dealing with both the members of the group and the material as will contribute directly towards the desired end.

To the practical-minded person these principles when studied will seem quite self-evident, plain common sense, in fact. As a result, if he is not careful, he is likely to make the serious mistake

of treating them lightly. It has been well said that "the most uncommon thing in the world is common sense." It cannot be emphasized too often or too strongly that these four fundamental principles must not be disregarded if the leader is to be successful. They must govern his procedure.

Resourcefulness Essential

The course in Management for Foremen was prepared with the foregoing principles in mind. But while great care was taken in organizing it in such a way as to suggest strongly both the direction to be followed and the method of handling, it was fully realized that to pin down such a course in advance with absolute precision is quite impossible. The human intermediary must enter in if guidance of any kind is to bring truly satisfactory results. The experience of certain well-organized correspondence courses is ample proof of this statement. The interpretation and personal contribution of a competent leader is absolutely essential to the attainment of good results. The author must be satisfied to indicate the subject-matter and how to make use of it. He cannot possibly provide a substitute for the human agent, the real leader.

The Typical Foreman - Experience

As to the requirements laid upon the leader of such a course, the following outline of the characteristics of the typical foreman are suggestive. What they imply in the way of method will appear later.

With rare exceptions foremen as a class are men of mature years with well-established habits and with much practical experience to their credit. Reliable statistics show that the typical foreman has climbed up from the ranks, and that he has had little formal schooling beyond that required by law. In fact, a considerable per cent of them somehow escaped even complying with the law, their education, barring limited knowledge of the three R's, being obtained in the "school of hard knocks." It need not surprise us, in view of these facts, that such men are skeptical regarding educational ventures of any kind, especially when so few of the group have ever profited from attending training classes. In fact, it would be surprising if they were not skeptical. How much have they or their colleagues ever obtained from the schools which was of direct aid to them in

their work? Is it not true that, with few exceptions, educational courses have been planned and conducted without the slightest regard for the vocation of the individual student?

Let us, therefore, approach the problem with our eyes open, and expect anything but excellent co-operation at first. The course must be "sold" to the foreman. He scoffs at theory in spite of the fact that his own rise from the ranks is due, in part at least, to his ability to make use of it. His motto is, "Practice makes perfect," regardless of the abundance of evidence to the contrary. What is more, he is honest in his convictions. His weakness is that he does not clearly see the distinction between theory and practice, and their respective applications. He does not realize that whenever he endeavors to find a reason for doing a certain thing, or to get at the "why" behind it, he is searching for theory. It is only by means of skillful leading that he may be led to the point of proper appreciation.

Reluctance to Discuss His Problems

The foreman's practical experience, however successful it may have been, has often developed in him a pronounced reluctance to discuss even his most vexing problems with others, especially with the "higher ups." Pride undoubtedly plays a prominent part here. He dislikes to admit he is having trouble since this, according to his way of thinking, is an open admission of weakness. Then, too, he knows full well that he cannot speak as glibly as his superiors, or as some one appointed by them to confer with him, and in consequence he decides to remain discreetly silent. More often than not he will sit submissively through a lecture or a conference given primarily for his benefit, and return to his office without having received any substantial assistance. If he has said anything, it has been in the nature of brief replies to questions.

The management, in such cases, is quite likely to lay the blame entirely upon the foreman's shoulders, maintaining that he should ask questions if he does not understand. That he suffers from embarrassment or false pride, or possibly feels that it is useless to say anything because the management cannot appreciate the true nature of the problem, does not enter the mind of his superiors.

Nevertheless, a man such as this will be found responsive if he is approached by some one whom he feels to be interested in his work, and really desirous of being helpful. But he must be met on his own ground, so to speak, and in a way that causes him to forget himself and his incapacities. Unless one gets "under his skin" and establishes the feeling of confidence indispensable to successful co-operation, the likelihood of getting results that are worth while is indeed remote.

Untrained in Analysis

It is a noteworthy fact that men who have got their training only through practical experience usually lack ability to analyze their jobs except in the most superficial manner. To aid them in overcoming this handicap is one of the chief functions of a training course. For until a man can see his job in detail, he cannot be expected to make marked improvement. The first step toward aiding him is to find out how fully he can analyze his job at the time. This involves inducing him to "open up," and be led to divulge his ideas, however difficult it may be to bring this to pass. The competent leader will somehow accomplish it. Quite frequently it may be done by assuming a point of view which squarely challenges the foreman. In his attempt to defend his position, he will often forget his inabilities, and reveal what he actually thinks about the matter. Most of us do our best thinking when opposed.

Regard for the "Square Deal"

Regard for the "square deal" is another of the outstanding characteristics of the typical foreman. It is to be expected, however, that his standard of ethics will not correspond in detail with that of his superiors. That would not be true of the men in any group, regardless of their respective occupations. Nor should it be held against him that he does not practice fully what he holds to be the "square" thing. It is only the analytical type of mind that can be expected to trace out the implications of any principle, and indicate the corresponding line of conduct.

Finally, the foreman has nothing but contempt for those who are condescending or patronizing in nature. He actually considers they are beneath him, and should be so treated. He may not be so cultured and refined as certain others, and he may

regret this fact, but he has battled too long against obstacles to look kindly on those who do not stand "squarely on both feet," as he puts it. His justifiable pride in his own success must be reckoned with, and this cannot be done except through straightforward, sincere efforts. If a class leader is ignorant regarding certain things, let him do what he wishes the foreman to do, namely, ask questions. The foreman will respect him for it, and a higher degree of co-operation will result. Treat the foreman as any red-blooded man should be treated, and in nine cases out of ten, he will satisfactorily respond.

Points on Class Organization

The foregoing facts have certain rather definite implications as to methods of organizing and conducting classes of this character.

(1) Classes should not be too large, nor yet extremely small. From fifteen to twenty is a good number.

(2) Class sessions should be limited in length to fifty or sixty minutes, with the understanding that not to exceed fifteen additional minutes may be taken if the interest seems to warrant.

(3) Class sessions should be held strictly according to schedule, starting and closing on time. Should the hour first chosen prove unsatisfactory, it should be changed without delay.

(4) Leaders should be on hand and ready for work at the scheduled time. Nothing kills a class more quickly than laxness in the leader.

(5) Class sessions should be held weekly for a period of twelve or fifteen weeks at most. The practice of trying to hold classes throughout the entire year is unsound in principle, since it does not accord with the nature of those who are taking the work. The "short unit" idea, which is proving so successful in dealing with the same type of individual in the evening schools of the country, applies here.

Opinions differ as to the time of day for the class. Some say the class should be held on company time; others urge that the foreman should, at least, give his time if the company buys the course. Still others advise holding the class at noon, or at night just before and just after closing.

The arguments in favor of holding class during working hours are:

(1) The attendance is assured if the men are paid for their time.

(2) Compliance with assignments may be expected to a greater degree.

(3) It provides opportunity for assistants to develop when the chief is away.

The arguments against holding classes during working hours are:

(1) The men are less likely to throw themselves into it vigorously for the reason that they feel it is compulsory. They would get more out of it if it were given outside the plant.

(2) They are likely to resent the attitude of the management if it seeks to provide everything, the course, the time, and the leader.

(3) They dislike to leave their departments for as long as an hour at a time, especially since the management holds them responsible for what takes place in the meanwhile.

The determination of this important point must be left to those chiefly concerned. It stands to reason that the same arrangement would not be suitable for all establishments.

To be successful the class leader must make thorough preparation. He will do well to bear in mind that compulsory attendance is not operative in such classes, and that as a result the responsi-

bility for making the class go falls almost entirely upon his shoulders. To be sure if the classes are held during working hours the problem is different. But any leader will soon wish to resign his position if he does not appeal to the men as being worth while. They cannot refrain from voicing their disapproval in some form or other.

Every phase of the lesson should be considered beforehand, together with its probable line of development through class discussion. To do this will require more than ten or fifteen minutes of hurried study; it will require, rather, several hours of careful preparation. Any leader may rest assured that the amount and quality of work he performs will early be reflected in the response of his students. Likewise he safely may assume that his requests for co-operation will avail little or nothing unless the character of his work is such as to advertise him favorably.

Keeping the Student at Work

It is equally essential that the leader's preparation shall be of the right kind. He must clearly understand the nature of the service he should render. Since his chief function is to direct the development of others he should devise ways and means of stimulating his students to do the work he lays out, and to do it in the right way. It would be difficult to overemphasize this point. Getting work out of the other fellow, work of the right sort, should be ever in the mind of those who direct others. If the men in the class do not give considerable thought to the work during the week, it is a foregone conclusion that they will derive little benefit from it. The main lines of thought should be determined by wise direction; likewise what shall constitute the kernel of the next session's thought should be indicated at the close of each class session. Two or three important lines of thought are always preferable to several more or less unimportant ones.

Definite assignments are necessary but they should be sparingly given, especially at first. It must not be forgotten that these men's minds are occupied with various kinds of problems throughout the day. They cannot be expected, therefore, to assume much additional load. The wise thing to do is to relate the assignment to each man's job in such a

way that he will almost be forced to think about it when engaged in his daily work. It will be found advisable at times to assign the same question or questions to certain members of the class, and other questions to other members.

The manner of assigning these tasks must also be given careful attention. Be sure that the assignment is clear. These men are unaccustomed, for the most part, to written directions, and are likely to gain an entirely wrong conception. Because of this it will be well to take several minutes at each session to talk over the work for the next session. In case any of the men are asked to report at a later date, care should be taken to note the date of such report, and to give a reminder beforehand to the one who is to make the report. Careless bookkeeping on the part of leaders is often responsible for loss of interest on the part of class members. Why should a leader hold the respect of his students if he asks for reports and then forgets all about them? If they are worth while asking for they certainly should be worth following up. The "follow-up" is just as essential in educational work as in business.

Stimulating Discussion

The course in management for foremen was organized so as to indicate as well as to develop lines of thought. The questions for each unit are intended to serve a two-fold purpose, namely, to indicate desirable points for discussion and to serve as a model for other questions which the leader should see fit to devise. It need not be pointed out that back of all this is the conviction that men of the foreman type will derive greatest good from training courses when they are led to take active part in the discussion. The question, of course, is the chief means of stimulating them to take part. It is likewise the chief means of finding out what the student knows, and should therefore be used freely, yet wisely. One is in no position to help another until he knows what kind of help the other person needs.

Since these men are not accustomed to carrying on discussions of the kind set forth in this course, and since also men with their training have great difficulty in keeping to the point in a discussion, it will be advantageous for all to have the

point under discussion posted up in a conspicucus place. In case duplicate copies of the material for the lesson are already in the hands of the men, it will be sufficient if the new point is placed on the blackboard or in some other place provided for the purpose. The value of this advice will be duly appreciated after the leader has vainly attempted to keep the men from drifting away from the point on different occasions. He will soon find, if he does not already know it, that it is the exception rather than the rule for such men to stick to the original point of discussion for even five or ten minutes, not to mention a half-hour. The usual thing is for them to drift so far away that they are actually unable to recall their starting point. Such procedure is dangerous, since it tends to make the course pointless.

Definite Progress

Any suggestions or criticisms of worth while character should be noted down by the leader, and reintroduced into the discussion at the opportune moment. If, as is likely to happen, any of these should be brought to the attention of the management in order that action may be taken and the men notified, by all means increase the confidence of the men by seeing that the reports are made in a thoroughly businesslike manner.

Avoid leaving a lot of "loose ends" at the close of the sessions. It is only too easy to have an interesting time during the class, and yet get nowhere in particular. Specific progress should mark every session. The men should leave with the feeling that at least two or three good points have been carefully considered. That this may be true will necessitate much care at times on the leader's part. He will need to watch the clock; to guide the discussion; to inject new thought perhaps; to call the men back to the original point, all, of course, in a tactful and courteous manner. Otherwise many sessions will be largely profitless.

References for Reading

One of the chief means of self-development is getting new points of view. This is usually done through contact with others. Because of this, selected references to books and magazine articles have been given with each unit of the course. Some of the men will read these, or at least the best of

them, if the leader is wise enough to indicate the nature of the references. What he does in this respect may mean everything to some of the men. He must remember that their time is limited and that they will read only what they find to be of direct value to them.

Characteristics of Foremen -- Summary

For the leader's convenience the following summary is given. The various points, it will be noted, correspond with those heretofore discussed:

(1) They are practical men with considerable experience and well-established habits.

(2) They are specialists in their line.

(3) They firmly believe that "practice makes perfect."

(4) They are usually somewhat jealous of authority.

(5) They are inclined to be skeptical regarding training schemes of any kind.

(6) They are often hesitant about discussing their problems with those above them.

(7) They almost invariably lack ability to analyze their jobs in a scientific manner.

(8) They do their best thinking when antagonized.

(9) They have learned almost exclusively through the "trial and error" method.

(10) They usually respond to suggestions which seem practicable to them.

(11) They have high regard for the "square deal."

(12) They thoroughly enjoy "showing up" college men and others who have obviously had better educational opportunities.

Conclusions Regarding Methods to be Employed

(1) Make use of suitable questions on the foreman's job.

(2) Invite and encourage free discussion of his problems.

(3) Place subject or topic under discussion in a conspicuous place and hold men to the point.

(4) Make careful note of suggestions or criticisms offered.

(5) Plan work so as to finish a unit or a definite part of a unit at each session.

(6) If a point under discussion or question raised requires executive action, see that something is done about it. The leader should always study the material carefully; often he should add other material of more intimate nature.

(7) Take time to read references.

(8) Men are more likely to read worthwhile references if they know that the leader is doing this himself.

(9) Occasional talks by heads of departments or by outsiders on live topics will prove helpful. Make free and effective use of charts and graphs.